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ABSTRACT

The lexical approach to teaching Russian grammar is explained, an instructional sequence is outlined, and a classroom study testing the effectiveness of the approach is reported. The lexical approach draws on research on cognitive psychology, second language acquisition theory, and research on learner language. Its bases in research and its principles are reviewed, and a sample instructional sequence designed to balance lexicon and grammar in Russian instruction is presented. In it, grammar is treated as part of the properties of the lexical items in question, the operation and native-language translations in the learner's mind is accepted as a psychological reality of language processing, and the main operational unit in teaching and learning is a phrase rather than a sentence. The six-stage approach includes: selecting and organizing appropriate material; identifying potential problems the student might experience in dealing with a specific target-language word, in relation to his native language; explaining and modeling new patterns; helping students learn from examples; use of pre-production exercises; and student production. A classroom experiment with 34 college-level Russian students found the approach to be effective in developing students' accuracy and fluency in the use of new grammar items. Contains 63 references. (MSE)

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ED 427 535

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A model for applying lexical approach in teaching Russian grammar

ABSTRACT The author will share her experience in practical application of the approach known in literature as the lexical approach to teaching grammar. The theoretical framework of this article rests on research in cognitive psychology, linguistic theory of Second Language Acquisition, research and thinking in the field of learner language. The article will briefly review related literature, discuss some essential tenets of the lexical approach to teaching grammar and will present a sample instructional sequence developed by the author with the purpose of creating a working balance between the two main aspects of foreign language - its lexicon and grammar. The results of the pedagogical experiment suggest that lexical approach to teaching grammar has a considerable effect on the accuracy and fluency in using new grammar items by English-speaking learners of Russian. The study acknowledges the need for longitudinal studies to investigate the long--term effects of the approach.

Introduction

Russian presents a serious challenge for English-speaking learners, compared to other commonly taught foreign languages. Carroll (1967) and Liskin-Gasparro (1982) showed that while French, Italian and Spanish are the easiest languages for English-speaking students, German, Russian and Hebrew are the languages that are more difficult to master: the attainment of a certain level in German, Russian and Hebrew by English-speaking students takes longer than attainment of the same level in Spanish, Italian and French (Ommaggio, 1986).

Brecht et al. (1995) noted that "the high price of acquiring languages like Russian (discouraging perceptions about the difficulty of the language and the amount of time and effort it takes to reach even minimal levels of competence compared with a language like Spanish" (Brecht, 1995, p.11) became one of the factors that depressed the number of students taking Russian in recent years . Compared to other

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foreign languages Russian is a school subject characterized by the highest attrition rates - approximately 50% of the students drop the college course after the first year compared to 25% for Spanish and French (ACTR Newsletter, winter 1999, p. 23). The most likely cause of high attrition rates after the first year of Russian is the students' frustration produced by inefficiency of the course, *i.e.* the discrepancy between the amount of effort and time required to master the language, on one hand, and the learning outcomes, on the other.

Brecht' s study reported that when those who had dropped the Russian course were questioned as to why, most said that they had found it too difficult and that they did not believe that they would be able to be proficient enough to use the language. The students' perceptions about the "difficulty " of Russian are on the whole justified: the same study demonstrated "that the level of practical command of Russian attained by the majority of students in the United States after four years of college study is quite modest, especially in speaking and listening: 13% reach the Advanced Level after four years of college study in speaking, 55% in reading, 31% in listening (Brecht, 1995, p. 31).

The main challenge for students studying Russian is the inflectional character of the language. Coming from a fixed -order language background, English speakers of Russian will have to learn to pay special attention to the morphology of words, their constantly changing endings --a trade-off for a relatively free order of words in a Russian sentence. In order to express a certain idea in Russian, one must know not only the dictionary form of the word denoting the relevant objects, qualities, actions etc. . One must also know in what forms these words must be used and how to select the appropriate morphological variant out of many possible forms of the same word. A Russian adjective, for example, may take 24 (!) different forms (six cases multiplied by three genders in the singular plus six cases in the plural plus four short form adjectives). Russian for *big*, for instance, is translated into English by 12 different forms.

The character of the language has a direct bearing on the progress in studying and may be responsible for a somewhat delayed transition of English -speaking students of Russian to higher levels of oral

proficiency. Studies in oral proficiency development in students enrolled in academic Russian language programs have shown that the Novice level is passed through quite rapidly, but it takes a long time for learners to pass through Intermediate level to Advanced level proficiency (Brecht, 1993; Henry, 1991; Liskin-Gasparro et al, 1991). The study conducted by Henry (1996) revealed a significant jump in fluency in early stages (between first and second semester) and a considerable drop in accuracy for the fourth semester group. In the meantime, studies conducted with the purpose of identifying variables affecting the transition to higher levels in proficiency show that those who have higher scores in grammar tests are more successful in making transition into the next level in speaking, reading and listening (Ewa Golonka, 1998). It is not surprising, therefore, that the issue of grammatical accuracy is one of the chief concerns of the profession.

It should be emphasized that the drop in accuracy occurs in the interim when the students are expected to develop the ability to *create with the language* to express personal meaning --an important shift from Novice-High towards Intermediate-High and Advanced levels of proficiency and testifies to the inability of many students to control several concurrent processes - control of both meaning and form-- which leads to their interference with each other (Kirst and Kalmar, 1987).

The present article grew out of the modest intention of a classroom teacher to improve grammar instruction by making it more efficient and user-friendly. The concept of"user-friendliness" or "usability" originated in cognitive psychology and now encompasses the study of the entire range of situations in which people interact with manufactured objects, and user-friendliness describes *the ease* with which a person could interact with a computer (Benjafield, p. 391). Stevens defines user-friendliness as something that helps a person to perform a task in a natural way, which is easy to understand and use (Stevens, 1983).

In the following sections of the article we will show that creating a balance between the two major aspects of teaching a language -- its grammar and its lexicon --congruent with the reality of language

processing, accelerates grammar instruction by increasing its learnability, accuracy and subjective satisfaction of the learners..

Lexical Approach to Teaching Grammar: Overview of Literature

A number of linguistic theories point to the key role of lexicon in L2 learning and acquisition. It led some researchers to address the issue of generating a more lexically - oriented grammar instruction in a foreign language classroom. Review of related studies reveals that this approach is still in infancy and lacks data about its classroom application.

One of the most important implications of perhaps the most influential contemporary linguistic theory of language acquisition-- the Chomskyan UG model --concerns vocabulary. An in-depth overview of the theory and its implications to teaching and learning can be found in Cook (Cook, 1994, 1996, Cook and Newson, 1996). While commenting on the pedagogical implications of the UG to learning, Cook writes: "...learners need to spend comparatively little effort on grammatical structure, since it results from the setting of a handful of parameters. They do, however, need to acquire an immense amount of detail about how individual words are used. The comparative simplicity of syntax learning in the UG model is achieved by increasing the burden of vocabulary learning. "(Cook, 1996, p. 156). Universal Grammar model of L2 learning emphasizes the teaching of vocabulary with the specifications of how words can occur in grammatical structures (Cook, 1996, p 158). Teaching is effective "when it builds up this [the students'] mental dictionary in the students' mind" (1994, p. 43). To know the word means " to know how each word *behaves* in a sentence. In other words, the student has to learn not just the meaning and pronunciation of each word, but how to use it" (Cook, 1996, p. 56).

The crucial importance of vocabulary in language acquisition is emphasized in a number of other theories of grammar -- Lexical Functional Grammar, Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar, Government/ Binding, Head Driven Phrase Structure Grammar. A thorough analysis of the key

assumptions of these theories in their relation to pedagogical grammar was found in Hubbard (Hubbard, 1994). Hubbard believes the focus on lexical subcategorization is one of the most interesting trends in contemporary linguistics (Hubbard, 1994, p. 69). He notes: " While it is not yet clear how to integrate lexical subcategorization and grammar teaching, it is clear that they need to be brought together to greater degree than it is commonly done"(Hubbard, 1994, p. 64).

Strict lexicalism is one of the leading ideas of current work in Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar and is based on the observation that human linguistic sentence processing has a powerful lexical basis.(Pollard and Sag, 1994).

Westney in his study (Westney, 1994) showed how specific area of English syntax can be treated within a strictly lexical approach.

The study by Little (Little, 1994) reported on pedagogical experiment in teaching French to English-speaking learners and English to Danish --speaking learners. The findings obtained in the course of the experiment show that the largest part of language learning is learning of words and their properties (Little, 114).

Arguments in favor of lexically-driven grammar can be summarized in the following way:

Congruence with psycholinguistically realistic architecture for the grammar of human languages. Human linguistic sentence processing has a powerful lexical basis. Put simply, words are information-rich; hence certain key words play a pivotal role in the processing of the clauses that contain them. This simple observation is central to Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar theory, whose notion of phrase structure is built around the concept of a lexical head--a single word whose dictionary entry specifies information that determines crucial grammatical properties of the phrase it projects.

Age factor. Language acquisition after the age of biological maturation differs from the child's spontaneous and effortless attainment of one or more languages in that presumably only the invariant universal principles of language are available after childhood. Adults, late language learners, are not able

to set parameters for a new language. There is only one aspect of language that is subject to change -- vocabulary. The process of picking up words is (in contrast to the 'computational' system) is open - ended even after the maturation period and vocabulary enrichment continues to be possible throughout one's life (Chomsky, Strozer, 1993).

Words and implicit knowledge. There is an intimate connection between words and the evolvement of the implicit knowledge of grammar rules. People are able to abstract the structure of grammar without realizing it, *i.e.* acquire knowledge unconsciously (Reber, 1967; Reber and Allen, 1978; Reber and Lewis, 1977). The implicit knowledge of the language rules acquired by children simply by listening to the utterances in the environment at the early stage of their development makes them able to abstract the structure of the grammar without realizing it, unconsciously.

In order for the abstraction to take place, there must be a presence of recurring attributes. Abstraction is "the process of including recurring attributes, and excluding non-recurring ones" (Benjafield, p. 179). To create an abstraction and realize grammatical relations, brain needs *words*. Without words there are no grammatical rules and syntax: words in sentences and their actual shape inform the learner about the grammar of the target language. "Grammatical rules are derived from specific *instances* of the language in use rather than presenting them as structural abstractions. The truth of the matter is that the learners do not take in the rule. They take in *examples* of the rule which they use to 'crack the code'. So they in fact create or recreate rule systems for themselves. The only thing that is internalized is raw data (input), which, as the term 'raw' indicates, has to be processed by the learner and turned into mental representations, *i.e.* 'knowledge' of some sort. Saying that systematic learner behavior reflects an internalized rule is as unhelpful as saying that the patterns on a cabbage leaf are internalized sunshine or internalized rain" (Sharwood Smith, 1994, p.15).

Words and explicit knowledge. Words are more open to conscious analysis than grammar rules. Sharwood Smith noted that consciousness-raising is more relevant to areas like lexis where conscious

manipulation is more likely to work (Sharwood Smith, 1994, p. 180). On the other hand, explicit knowledge of grammar is useless unless we know some of the words whose behavior the words describe (Little, 1994, p.106)

Studies of communication strategies show that learners perceive the problems they have in making themselves understood as primarily lexical in nature. Learners' appeals for assistance, gestures, and paraphrases focus on gaps of vocabulary rather than on grammatical structure.

Inadequacy of grammar rules. Lexical syllabus is justified by the inherent inadequacy of any grammatical description. Westney (Westney, 1994) reminds us that most language facts remain highly resistant to tidy, systematic treatment-- the nature of the language resists to simple, precise rules. Above the level of simple morphology notions, even seemingly well-defined rules contain great complexity due to their inherent variability and vagueness. That is why the evidence available may simply not support any safe generalization and will create a particular problem for both teachers and learners in the situations where clear-cut rules and explanations are over-valued.

Lexicon and Communicative methodology. There seems to be a more intimate connection between the lexicon and the communicative approach to teaching. In the above-cited study, Little argues that traditional approaches to pedagogical grammar separate meaning and form and run counter not only to the demands of the communicative language teaching but to realities of language acquisition and language processing because such grammars "invite us to move from the abstract to the concrete, from the general rule to its specific realization "(Little, 1994, p. 105). "Communicative approach requires that formal features of the language should always be treated in terms of the meaning they communicate and that form is a servant of meaning. Meaning is stored in words rather than in structures and in this sense words indeed ' come before structures'...and communicative principles imply that pedagogical grammar should seek ways of this priority of the word"(Little, 1994, p. 106)

Lexical nature of language errors. Many of the complexities of a language can be seen as having more to do with how particular *words* are used and make students' errors essentially lexical in nature. Each individual instance of a error is a matter first of words and only second of general rules.

Studies in interlanguage also support this point. According to Selinker "words are very good candidates for units of equivalence in language contact situations"(Selinker, 1992, p. 59). According to Selinker, it is on the basis of words learners create cross-linguistic interlingual identifications. We will consider this issue in more detail in the next section.

Lexical nature of language errors.

There is enough evidence to believe that mental lexicon is presumably organized as a dictionary - a mental list of lexical items together with detailed information about each one (Aitchinson, Miller and Gildea, Brown and Mc Neil).

This is how Clark (1993) described the mental lexical entry in the following way. Lexical entries in the mental lexicon include the meaning, the syntactic form, the morphological structure, the phonological structure of each item. The meaning in a lexical entry is linked to the set of *syntactic properties*, that is to all the aspects of structure relevant to the possible syntactic environment (Clark, p. 3). Some words, like verbs, for example, have a more elaborate syntactic information than other words. In addition to specifying the syntactic category, the verb entry specifies the number of arguments. For a transitive verb there are two arguments, that of a subject and that of an object. The lexical entry also indicates which roles are carried by the arguments (agent, patient, location). The morphological portion of the entry contains all the *variant forms* of each word. All the inflected forms of a word belong to the same lexical entry. Lexical items, then, are grouped into sets that link all the inflected forms of the same word within a single lexical entry (for example, nouns and adjectives inflected for case and gender, verbs, each marked with person, gender, number in additions to tense and aspect). Words that are derived from a single form,

but each sufficiently specialized in *meaning* have their own lexical entries (Clark, p. 5). As seen from this description, syntax and semantics are closely integrated in a mental word entry.

Computer simulation has been a very powerful force in trying to determine how the structure of the mental dictionary is organized. Electronic dictionaries widely used everywhere are good examples how computers can model the real cognitive process of the organization of the mental dictionary. Miller and Gildea, creators of *Wordnet* -- a computerized dictionary designed for use by children maintain that in order for a dictionary to be psychologically real a dictionary should be organized in terms of semantic relations between words.

Although there is no general agreement as to how the *two* various lexicons are organized in the minds of bilingual and multilingual speakers there is increasing evidence in favor of a *single integrated network* (Green, 1986; Kirsner et al, 1984). The study by Singleton and Little (1991) provides indications that there is at least some degree of interconnection between L1 and L2 lexical storage and processing. The study conducted by Green showed that if a person knows two languages reasonably well, words are possibly subconsciously activated in both languages and then the language which is wanted is surpressed. The process of selecting one word and inhibiting the others when two languages are involved seems to be similar to the process of choosing the most relevant word from a range of synonyms.

Aichinson considered the mechanism of language error within the theory of 'spreading activation'(Anderson, 1984) which explains how humans might search for words in speech production. When producing a word, humans must pick the meaning before the sound is considered. Once a topic is activated the whole range of related sound and meaning words get excited. As the search continues, the mind activates *many more* words related to the same semantic area than are likely to be used and the memory keeps related words *activated* in the semantic component during the process of decision-making. All these words remain available until the required word has been picked. As the activated links are

inspected, those that are relevant get more and more excited while those that are unwanted fade away (Aitchinson, p.174).

If L1 and L2 indeed form one integrated system, then it is easy to see why the L1 words require a relatively lower level of activation in order to be born, while less familiar words of L2 are harder to arouse.

To sum up, no matter how obscure the details of the process may be, the L1 lexicon presumably remains available to the learner in the process of the L2 word search. The spreading activation model may account for most common language errors caused by the effect of L1 lexis on the process of L2 word search . Let's consider two examples.

English-speaking learners of Russian often say *Он вышел замуж* за неё.(Он сразу *женился* на ней). In this example, the intention of the speaker led to the activation of the semantic network comprising the L1 word *married*. The fact that English uses *one* word irrespective of the nature of the object -- a female or a male--was presumably the deciding factor in producing this particular mistake even with the supposition that the learner's memory already contained the competing equivalent *жениться на + Prepositional case* in the word storage: in the course of the word processing it was not activated enough to contend with the rule of the mother tongue requiring the use of one word in all contexts. Consequently the wrong phrase *выходить замуж* was picked.

Similarly, Russian learners of English often say: *Christine married to Andrew*. Here the speaker's intention led to the activation of the semantic component with the Russian phrase *вышла замуж за + Accusative case*, used if the subject is a female and the object is a word denoting a male. The pattern used in the L1 word stayed active in the working memory, prevailed and led the student to use the preposition *to* wrongly assumed to be the equivalent of *за*.

In both instances 1. the errors have a lexical basis and were caused by insufficient knowledge (or control) of the constraints imposed by the specific language on the use of the word; 2. L1 lexicon is

interacting with the L2 lexicon through establishing translation equivalents. This conclusion is congruent with the observation made by Selinker (Selinker, 1994) who pointed to the importance of translation equivalents in interlanguge investigation and called translation equivalents "an important strategy for learners as they look across linguistic systems" (Selinker, p. 258)

The question now is: should we ignore the key role of NL translation equivalents in error production and assume that with sufficient amount of FL input their interference will be neutralized? or should we accept the existence of translation equivalents as the reality of language processing in the speech production and use this phenomenon as an effective means of learners' consciousness- raising? If grammar indeed "should be psychologically real; that is, it should be a direct representation of the underlying linguistic competence of a speaker" (Hubbard, p. 58) then the second direction seems to be more viable and practicable.

Another important reason justifying the presence of the mother tongue in a foreign language classroom may be found in the recently approved Foreign Language Standards that urge us to take a fresh look at the role of the mother tongue in teaching a foreign language. *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century* considerably broaden the content range of language learning by venturing well beyond the traditional four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The addition of *Comparisons Standard 4.1* "Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own" (Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century 1996: 9), encourage students to develop insight into the very nature of the language as a system and make the presence the native language and culture in a foreign language classroom completely legitimate.

Instructional Sequence

The instructional sequence which we will outline below represents an attempt to create a kind of pedagogical grammar that would be congruent with psycholinguistically realistic grammar of the human language and is characterized by the following features.

(1) Grammar is treated more as part of the properties of individual lexical items. Some grammatical generalizations traditionally treated in detail simply become redundant. High-level grammatical rules are derived from specific instances of the language.

(2) The operation of L1 translation equivalents in the mind of the learners is accepted as a psychological reality of language processing and is utilized in teaching as a way of consciousness-raising. Students are made aware of the differences between the two languages in the means of expression and translation equivalents are used to aid students in their comprehension of the new language phenomena. L1 is seen as a 'prior knowledge' and students build the new knowledge on the already existing knowledge. In other words, L1 serves as an important point of reference and helps the teacher to build bridges between new and existing knowledge.

(3) To increase the user-friendliness ('usability ') of the information, the main operational unit in teaching and learning is a phrase: the language sample is presented and practiced in a phrase rather than in a sentence. The latter minimizes the learners' memory load, prevents errors and is an important trade-off for increasing the number of opportunities to practice a new language item. Our basic assumption is that in teaching skills, practice is a crucial learning activity and the major goal of instruction is to provide opportunities to practice and maximize the rate at which students acquire rules and increase relevant learning time. With this purpose in view skills are broken down into simpler subskills and are mastered incrementally. The instructional sequence aims at maximizing both the time spent on skill acquisition and by structuring exercise sequence in the way that it would minimize the error rate.

Stage 1: Selecting and Organizing Material

Not all words are equally 'important' from the point of view of grammar instruction. The distinction between content and function words is of primary significance since the latter have more elaborate syntactic information that other words. Statistical considerations such as the frequency of words is taken into account as well as potential difficulty for a learner.

Special attention is given to verbs, since in the mental lexicon verbs are particularly heavily loaded with syntactic information and are attached to information about constructions normally associated with them and need at the very least to specify the constructions which must, or must not, follow them in a sentence, which often involves reference to other parts of speech (Aitchison, p. 101)

Stage two:Contrastive Analysis

The purpose of contrastive analysis is to identify potential problems the students might experience in dealing with a specific FL language word and represents an attempt to gain access to the learner's intuition about FL. This stage is divided into several steps.

Step one. A FL lexical unit is paired with postulated NL equivalent of the given lexical unit. The latter is obtained through establishing most likely translation equivalents in the native language of the students. For example, if the Russian conjunction *что* is introduced, the first step would be identifying the English translation equivalent for *что*:

что = *what, that*

What, however, may be translated into Russian as not only *что,* but as *какой, какая, какое, какие, какого, какому, каком, что* etc. . The choice of the equivalent depends on whether *what* is an interrogative pronoun or an interrogative adjective, and the case, gender and number of the noun it refers to:

what = *1. что*

2. какой, какая, какое, какие, какого, какому, каком, какой, какую, каких, каким

Insufficient knowledge of the distinction between the two functions is often a cause of mistakes like:

What book... = что книга...(какая книга)

For an English teacher teaching Russian students, the first step will include establishing translation equivalent of the word *what* in Russian:

What = что; какой

and English equivalents of:

что = what

and

какой = which, what

While *что = what* does not present any problem for Russian learners of English, the choice between *which* and *what* is often the cause of mistakes:

What train are you taking: the 9: 30 or the 11:45? (Which train are you taking...?)

Step two. Rules.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

1. the students should realize that a word, for example, *what (this, study etc.)* may have different functions in a sentence;

2. the students should be able to recognize and distinguish the functions of *what (this, study etc.)* in a sentence.

Rules are presented in the format of *production rules.* According to the author of ACT* theory-- J. R. Anderson's ACT *--Adaptive Control of Thought, production rules are *if-then* or *condition-action* pairs. The *if,* or *condition,* part specifies the circumstance under which the rule will apply. The *then,* or *action,* part of the rule specifies what *to do* in that circumstance (Anderson, 1993, p. 4).

In the production rule format the language rule may be presented in the following way:

1. If *what* is used in an exclamation

then it is translated as *какой, какая, какое, какие:*

What a nice day! = Какой....

What a nice woman = Какая...

2. If *what* is used in a question and modifies a noun in the sentence

then it is translated as *какой, какая, какое, какие, какого, какому, каком, какой, какую, каких, каким:*

What book are you reading? = Какую....

What color do you like? = Какой...

What books do you read? = Какие....

3. If *what* is used as a subject in questions

then it is translated as *что, чего, чему, чём:*

What is this? = Что это?

4. in some common idiomatic expressions *what* is translated as:

What is your name = Как вас зовут?

What time is it? = Сколько времени?

To satisfy more the usability criteria (Nielsen, 1993) one can use the following version of the rule:

1. If *what* is used to show surprise, alarm

translate it as *какой* before *a* masculine noun, *какая* before a feminine noun, *какое* before a neuter noun, *какие* before a noun in plural:

What a nice day! = Какой....

What a nice woman = Какая...

2. If *what* is used in a question and is followed by a noun

translate it as *какой, какая, какое, какие* etc. To select the form, refer to the following:

If *what* is followed by	translate it as:
a masculine noun denoting an animate object in the	

Accusative:	какого
a masculine noun in the Dative case:	какому
a masculine noun in the Genitive case:	какого
a masculine noun in the Prepositional case:	каком
a feminine noun in the Dative, Genitive or Prepositional case:	какой
a feminine noun in the Accusative case:	какую
a noun in Plural in the Genitive case:	каких
a noun in Plural in the Dative case:	каким

Examples:

What book are you reading? = Какую.... (*book книга* is a feminine noun in the Accusative case)

What color do you like?= Какой... (*color цвет* is a masculine inanimate noun in the Accusative case and does not change the dictionary form)

What books do you read? = Какие.... (*books* is a noun in plural in the Accusative case)

3. *If what* is used alone in a question

then it is translated as *что, чего, чему, чем.* To select the word refer to the following:

If *what* is used with prepositions or verbs requiring	translate *what* as...
the Genitive case	чего
the Dative case	чему
the Prepositional case	чём

Examples:

What are you talking about? *о чём* (about *о, об* requires the Prepositional case)

What is this? = Что это?

4. in some common idiomatic expressions *what* is translated as:

What is your name = Как вас зовут?

What time is it? = Сколько времени?

In this format rules seem to agree more with usability requirements (see Nielsen , 1993):

1.They are simple, *i.e.* do not contain information that is irrelevant (every extra unit of information competes with the relevant unit and diminishes its relative visibility).

2. They speak the user's language, the language easily understood by the learner, *i.e.* the language of the dictionary. The students begin to learn the foreign language with the expectation that most things that one would want to say in one language would have an equivalent in the other and resort to dictionary as the main source of establishing these correspondences.

3. They are expressed clearly in words and concepts familiar to all learners, rather than in specialized terms.

4. The learner does not have to remember information from some other source (declension of adjectives) or recall previously presented information. The latter minimizes the memory load.

5. They are very specific, *i. e.* refer to one particular word.

Stage three. Explaining and modeling.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

1. the students observe how rules may be applied in problem-solving;

2. the students memorize the sequence in which the cognitive operations have to be performed.

Hall pointed to the paramount significance of explaining and modeling as means of facilitating "instructional conversations"(ICs) " a developmentally rich pattern of teacher-students interaction whose purpose is to assist students' understanding and ability to communicate about concepts and ideas that are central to their learning" (Hall, 1988, p. 29). In contrast to traditional recitation pattern, a teacher-led-three-part sequence of I-R-E (teacher> initiation>student response>teacher evaluation). It signifies a movement from dependence on the assisted performance, when one can do something only with the assistance of a more capable or knowledgeable other, to the independent ability to perform in a given activity. Explaining, *i.e.* explicitly showing the students how to apply the information and to organize in an efficient manner greatly facilitates learning.

Using several examples of English sentences the teacher shows how the rule 'works'. She makes her own thinking explicit, modeling for the students the strategies they should use to solve a problem and

accomplish the task. Research on modeling (Bandura, 1977) has shown modeling to be an effective means of establishing abstract or rule-governed behavior. By watching what the teacher does students learn cognitive operations they are supposed to master. She then guides the students in the same tasks gradually decreasing her help as their new abilities develop. The following examples illustrate the techniques:.

Teacher: Imagine that you need to ask your friend in Russian if he called his parents yesterday.

The first problem when you ask this question is the verb *call* ? Do we use *звонил* or *позвонил,* (Perfective or Imperfective form)? If the purpose of the question is *merely* finding out whether the action took place, then the form *звонил* would be appropriate. However, if your friend had told you about his intention, in other words, the action had been planned, *позвонил* would be the form to be used.

The second problem is a case form for the word *parents родители,* since *call звонить* takes either Dative case or Prepositional object *в/на + Accusative.* Since *родители* is a word denoting people, it will take the Dative case *родителям.*

Stage four. Learning from examples.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

the students learn to perform cognitive operations independently;

the students compare their assumptions with those presented in the examples.

Examples are central to instructing in problem-solving skill. Many studies have demonstrated the value of students' analogical use of examples (Anderson, 1993; 1989; Chi et al, 1989; Reder et al, 1986, Reed, 1987; Ross, 1984, 1987). In teaching a foreign language, learning from examples serves to indicate the salient aspects of the examples and guide the analogy process, furnishes multiple opportunities for processing the aural and visual input provided by the teacher at the stage when the students are not yet ready to produce the language material. The procedure may be exemplified by the following task:

Compare the English sentences with their Russian equivalents. Make sure you understand why *this* is translated as *Этот, эта,* or *это.*

This book is interesting. Эта книга интересная.

This is an interesting book. Это интересная книга.

Is this your book? Это твоя книга.

etc.

Stage five. Pre-production Exercises.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

1. the students should learn to pronounce correctly the forms so that pronunciation of new words would not impede speech production at the next stage;

2. the student should create grammatically correct combinations of the morphological variants of the new word .

Exercises at this stage may vary from simple repetition drills, traditional "fill ups"and multiple choice drills to more creative activities.

Thus, on order to teach the students to pronounce correctly new forms, the teacher reads them out loud and suggest that the students read the forms after her:

this - это, этот, эта, это

After that the teacher asks the students to read the form that will be used before a feminine noun (masculine noun etc.):

Student: эта

In a multiple choice exercise students may practice selecting correct morphological variant out of two or more:

Which of the two forms of the verb should be used with this pronoun?

иду, идёшь - я

Student: иду

(It is important that the auditory image of the form is still in the working memory of the students)

Another useful exercise in the arsenal of the teacher is an exercise in error detection that forms what Sharwood Smith calls 'sensitivity to negative evidence' and facilitate metalingugstic activities without appealing to systematized metalinguistic knowledge (Sharwood Smith, p. 179). The exercise teaches receptive skills of recognizing gramaticalically (in)correct utterances. In the process of detecting errors, students' attention can be directed either to the form or to the meaning. At this point, however, it should be focused on the form. The task may be performed in different formats: the student may be asked to underline or cross out word combinations that they find grammatically incorrect.

Ты идёте...

Вы идёте...

Stage five. Production.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

the students identify the function of the word in a sentence, select the appropriate morphological variant of the word and synthesize both the meaning and the form in a FL translation equivalent.

This stage signifies transition from receptive skills to productive skills and is the first exercise where the students are actually allowed to produce the material. Exercises in partial translation seem to satisfy best the requirement of this stage: they focus students' attention to one difficulty at a time and enable the teacher to use much broader and more cognitively challenging contexts than the ones that are usually utilized if a foreign language is the only medium (see Brooks and Donato):

Excerpt 1.

Which of the following words should be used to translate the words underlined in the sentence - *поступать* or *поступить*? Translate only underlined words.

I <u>applied to</u> several good universities.

I decided to apply to Yale...

When did you enter (were accepted to) Stanford?

Excerpt 2.

Use one the following word forms to translate the underlined words:

ходил (а, и), шёл, шла, шли, пошёл, пошла, пошли

N. used to go there every...

As he was walking along....

Then he went to...

Stage six. Pre-communicative practice.

Most commonly used methods and techinques can be successfully used at this stage: personalized questions and compilations, guided dialogues, paired interviews, conversation through an interpreter etc..

Excerpt 1.

Use these questions to speak about your academic schedule, your favorite subjects, your major etc.:

Where do you *study*?

How long have you been *studying* at this university?

Do you *study* hard?

What courses d*o you take* this semester?

Why do you *study* these particular subjects?

Excerpt 2.

Conversation through an interpreter. "American's " part:

Are you *Russian*? Do you speak *Russian* at home? Are your parents *Russian*? Do you speak *Russian* at home? Do you speak *Russian* well? Can you speak *Russian*?

Pedagogical Experiment

The subjects - thirty - four university students enrolled in Beginning Russian course were asked to read at home the textbook material which covered the use of verbs of motion in Russian and do several written exercises based on this material. For information students were referred to "Golosa" textbook (Robin et al., p.139-140 and two exercises p. 141-142. On the next day in class the instructor asked the students to translate into Russian in writing the underlined verbs of motion in the dialogue that was given to each of the participants of the experiment. After the task was completed, the instructor collected written assignments and suggested that the students would listen to another explanation of the same material. The instructor used the term 'dictionary approach' to refer to the strategy that she was going to utilize. The way it was done is presented in the Appendix. After the explanation was completed and students performed several drills and exercises to practice using the verbs of motion, they were again asked to repeat the previous assignment that was given earlier, i.e. to translate in writing the underlined verbs of motion in the dialogue. In addition to this, on completion of translation, students were asked to assess the usability of the method by marking the scale measuring subjective satisfaction with the teaching strategy used by the instructor :

Please mark the positions that best reflect your impressions of this teaching method:

The method makes material easy to understand	1 -	2 -	3 -	The method makes material difficult to understand
material easy to memorize	-	-	-	material difficult to memorize
I like it	-	-	-	I don't like it

The rating 2 was an estimate of "neutral","average " subjective satisfaction.

The measurement of subjective satisfaction showed that :

a. 29 students found that the strategy used by the instructor "makes material easy to understand";

5 students showed 'neutral' satisfaction;

none of the students indicated that the approach made material difficult to understand.

b. 25 students found that the approach "makes material easy to memorize";

nine students showed neutral satisfaction;

none of the students indicated that the approach made material difficult to memorize.

c. 27 students liked the approach;

seven indicated neutral satisfaction;

none of the students indicated that they did not like it.

In their comments some students wrote:

Student M. A. : " This approach ("the dictionary approach") gives more examples of specific situations to make it easier to understand"

Student I.: 'The textbook does not give an adequate enough explanation"

Student L.R. (about the "dictionary approach"): "It was so much clearer!"

Stydent J. B. (about the "dictionary approach") : "This is the best way to learn the material! even though I know that I will encounter difficulty with this in the future"

Student G. F.: "It is a little more difficult to learn more information like this, compared to less information presented in the textbook, but I still think this way was better"

Student A.: It seemed that explanations were so different that it is hard to think of them as the same material. But in principle, it see ms it would be a good system.

Student K Y: " I think this method is better that the textbook method, but it is true that since I leaned it the textbook first and then learned it again implementation may be partially due to learning it twice. But I like this method a lot. The more it is repeated the better my retention rate will be"

Student T.: " Insufficient examples in the textbook"

Student R. H.:"This is better than just using the textbook"

Student O. " I did not understand the textbook especially the remarks on ходить. I thought it means 'go backward and forth"

Students D. J.: "It is good that we covered all the verbs at once"

Pre- and post- test assignments were compared with the purpose of identifying erroneous use of the Russian verbs of motion. The comparison revealed that the number of errors in the post test use of verbs of motion considerably decreased as compared to pre-test (see Table 1):

Table 1

Errors in the Use of Verbs of Motion in Pre-test and Post-test

Students	Pre-test : # of mistakes	Post-test: # of mistakes	reduction by # of mistakes
1. C. S.	15	6	11
2. O. H.	8	1	7
3. W. P.	9	4	5
4. J.B.	10	1	9
5. D.J	8	3	5
6. O. M.	18	1	17
7. L. C.	9	3	6
8. R. H.	15	0	15
9. T. C.	12	3	9
10.C. K.	7	0	7
11. R.Y.	4	1	3
12. F.L.	16	1	15
13. B. S.	9	1	8
14. D.	7	1	6
15 Jared B.	8	4	4
16. M. S	11	1	10
17. I .J.	10	5	5
18. Y. F.	6	0	6
19.A. S .	18	10	8
20. G. F.	8	0	8
21. A.W	13	1	12
22. B. H 1	4	1	3
23. E. A.	11	3	8
24. G. C.	13	5	8
25. B.L.	14	1	13
26. J. B.2	7	1	6
27. J. T.	20	4	16
28. R. S.	3	2	1
29. S.G.	8	1	7
30. L.R.	5	2	3
31. K. P.	13	1	12

32. M.S.	12	4	8
33. B.H. 2	3	0	3
34. M.A.	9	4	5
Total of mistakes:	343	76	269

Conclusions

The results of the of the classroom application of the proposed strategy show that it considerably increases the accuracy in using foreign language items (verbs of motion) by decreasing the number of mistakes in students' utterances and that the overwhelming majority of students expressed satisfaction with the learning strategy the approach offers to the students. compared to more traditional "textbook" manner of presentation .

Some other important observations were obtained. although they were not measured directly in the course of the pedagogical experiment. The proposed strategy of presenting and practicing language material considerably increases the rate of learning by reducing decision-making to solving one difficulty at a time. The main operational unit in teaching and learning is a phrase: the language sample is presented and practiced in a phrase rather than in a sentence. The latter minimizes the learners' memory load, prevents errors and is an important trade-off for increasing the number of opportunities to practice a new language item. Thus, skills are broken down into simpler subskills for the purposes of presentation and practice and are mastered incrementally. As a result, students rarely made mistakes in the use of the verbs of motion not only in the post -test but in performing preliminary exercises as well. The amount of practice depends on whether the students are allowed to explore any path of solution they like with the only constraint that they finally execute a correct solution -- or are forced to stay on a path of correct solution and the floundering time is minimized and the students are likely to solve exercises successfully (Anderson, p. 237). To sum up, the proposed instructional strategy maximizes the time spent on skill acquisition and by structuring exercise sequence in the way that it would minimize the error rate.

Some important questions, however , still remain open for further research and may be answered in the course of empirical and classroom investigation..

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Appendix.

Instructional Sequence

Going places

Present Tense

Stage one and two: Selecting and Organizing Material. Contrastive Analysis.

a. идти, ходить = walk, go

ехать, ездить = to drive, to go, to take (a train, bus)

b. is, are, am going = иду; идёшь, идёт, идём, идёте, идут

c. is, *am, are* + *going*= еду, едешь, едет, едем, едете, едут (the context makes it clear that the vehicle is involved)

d. go(es) = (*usually) as* хожу, ходишь, ходит, ходим, ходите, ходят; or езжу, ездишь, ездит, ездим, ездите, ездят;

or иду, идёшь, идёт, идём, идёте, идут; or еду, едешь, едет, едем, едете, едут;

c. is, are, am driving = еду, едешь, едет, едем, едете, едут (на машине)

d. drive(s)= *usually as* езжу, ездишь, ездит, ездим, ездите, ездят

or еду, едешь, едет, едем, едете, едут (на машине)

e. is, are, am walking = иду, идёшь, идёт, идём, идёте, идут;

f. walk (s) = *usually as* хожу, ходишь, ходит, ходим, ходите, ходят

or иду, идёшь, идёт, идём, идёте, идут

g. am, is, are taking a train (bus, taxi) еду, едешь, едет, едем, едете, едут (на поезде, автобусе)

h. take(s) a train (bus, taxi) езжу, ездишь, ездит, ездим, ездите, ездят(на поезде, автобусе)

Rules.

Translating *go* into Russian.

If *go* is used in the...	and denotes a motion that occurs	and the context	translate *go* as...
Present Continuos Tense: *is, are, am + going*	at the moment of speaking or intention	makes it clear that a vehicle is used	еду, едешь, едет, едем, едете, едут
Present Indefinite Tense: *go(es)*	habitually	makes it clear that a vehicle is used	езжу, ездишь. ездит, ездим, ездите, ездят
Present Continious Tense: *is, are, am + going*	at the moment of speaking or intention	does not make it clear if a vehicle is used	иду, идёшь, идёт, идём, идёте, идут
Present Indefinite Tense: *go(es)*	habitually	does not make it clear if a vehicle is used	хожу, ходишь, ходит, ходим, ходят, ходите

Translating *walk* into Russian.

If *walk* is used in the...	and denotes a motion that occurs...	translate *walk* as...
Present Continuos Tense: *is, are, am + walking*	at the moment of speaking	иду, идёшь, идёт, идём, идёте, идут (пешком)
Present Indefinite Tense: walk (s)	habitually	хожу, ходишь, ходит, ходим, ходят, ходите (пешком)
Present Continuos Tense: *is, are, am + walking or* Present Indefinite Tense: walk(s) and means 'to stroll"	at the moment of speaking or habitually	гуляю, гуляешь, гуляет, гуляем, гуляете, гуляют

Translating *drive* into Russian.

If *drive* is used in the ...	and denotes a motion that occurs	translate *drive* as...
Present Continuos Tense: *is, are, am + driving to a place*	at the moment of speaking or intention	еду, едешь, едет, едем, едете, едут (на машине)
Present Indefinite Tense: drive(s) to	habitually	езжу, ездишь. ездит, ездим, ездите, ездят (на машине)
Present Continuos Tense: *is, are, am + driving or* Present Indefinite Tense: drive(s) and means 'to control a vehicle"(She is driving a family car)	at the moment of speaking or intention	веду, ведёшь, ведёт, ведём, ведёте, ведут (машину)
Present Continuos Tense Present Indefinite Tense: drive(s) to He is driving her home	at the moment of speaking or intention	везу, везёшь, везёт, везём, везёте, везут

Present Indefinite Tense: drive(s) to Present Indefinite Tense: He drive(s) her home	habitually	вожу, возишь, возит, возим, возите, возят

Translating *take a train (bus, taxi)* into Russian.

If *take a train (bus)* is used in the...	and denotes a motion that occurs...	translate *take a train (bus)* as ...
Present Continuos Tense: *is, are, am + taking a train (bus)*	at the moment of speaking or intention	еду, едешь, едет, едем, едете, едут на поезде (автобусе)
Present Indefinite Tense: take (s) a train (bus)	habitually	езжу, ездишь. ездит, ездим, ездите, ездят на поезде (автобусе)

Stage three. Explaining and modeling.

Using several examples, the teacher explains how the rule 'works":

Let's see how these rules work! Read the sentences and decide which of the forms *еду, едешь, едет, едем, едете, едут* or *иду, идёшь, идёт, идём, идёте, идут* will be used to translate the verb *go:*

A: I am going to the theater to-night =....иду....

(The context does not indicate that there is a vehicle involved. The verb is used in the Present Continuos Tense and indicates an intention)

B: Are you driving? = ...едешь на машине...

(The verb is used in the Present Continuos Tense and indicates an intention)

A: No, I am taking a train =...еду на поезде

(The verb is used in the Present Continuos Tense and indicates an intention)

etc.

Stage four. Pre-production exercises.

The teacher suggests that the students take a few minutes to learn the new rules.

After the rules are memorized by the students, the teacher may conduct the following exercises.

Exercise one.

You will hear the form of the verb идти. Say what pronoun it is used with.

Model:

иду

- Я

Exercise two.

You will hear a pronoun. Which of the following forms of *the verb идти will be used with the pronoun:* иду, идёшь, идёт, идём, идёте, идут?

Model:

я

- иду.

Exercise three.

You will hear two verbs and a pronoun or a noun. Say which of the two forms of the verb should be used with this pronoun or noun.

Model:

идём, идёте - Вы

- идёте

Exercise four.

Mark the form that needs to be corrected.

Я идёшь..

Вы идёте...

Stage five. Production.

Exercise one.

Translate the underlined words.

A: I am going to the movies to-night.

B: Are you going to San Francisco?

A: No, I am going downtown.

B. Are you driving?

Stage six. Pre-communicative practice.

Exercise one.

Answer these questions in Russian.

Do you often go downtown?

How often do you go downtown?

Do you drive or walk?

etc.

Exercise two.

Conversation through an interpreter. "American's " part:

Hi, my name is....

Nice to meet you.

Where are you going?

Do you often go there?

etc.